EPIC COMICS

SISTERHOOD OF STEEL 1
DECEMBER 1984

$1.50 | $1.75 CANADA

MARVEL

THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL

PREMIER ISSUE

creator / writer
CHRISTY MARX

creator / artist
MIKE VOSBURG

letterer
TOM ORZECHOWSKI
L. LOIS BUHALIS

EPIC COMICS

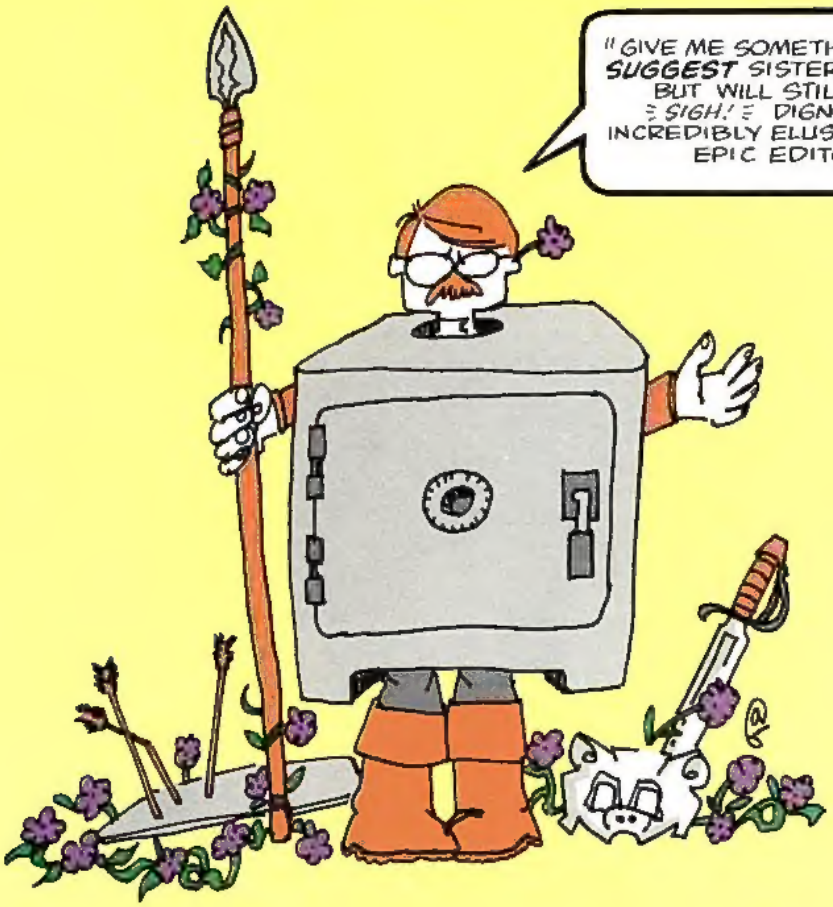
associate editor
LAURIE SUTTON

editor
ARCHIE GOODWIN

consulting editor
JIM SHOOTER

HI. ARCHIE GOODWIN, EDITOR OF MARVEL'S ***EPIC COMICS*** LINE, WELCOMING YOU TO THE PREMIERE OF ***SISTERHOOD OF STEEL***, A UNIQUE FANTASY ADVENTURE SERIES WRITTEN BY CHRISTY MARX AND DRAWN BY MIKE VOSBURG. IT'S SORT OF CUSTOMARY THAT I DO THESE APPEARANCES DRESSED AS A CHARACTER FROM THE BOOK INVOLVED. I LOOK RIDICULOUS BUT FANS SEEM TO LIKE CHEAP LAUGHS AT MY EXPENSE. HOWEVER, THIS PARTICULAR BOOK POSES A PROBLEM. IT'S CHARACTERS ARE *MOSTLY* ***FEMALE***. TRUE, I ONCE APPEARED IN OUR ***DREADSTAR*** TITLE AS THE FEMALE LEAD, WILLOW. FRANKLY, I DON'T KNOW WHICH WAS *MORE* UNCOMFORTABLE: THE ***GIRDLE*** I HAD TO WEAR OR THE ***MAIL*** I BEGAN RECEIVING. I RESOLVED TO EMERGE FROM ***THIS*** OUTING WITH SOME DIGNITY, SO I GAVE CAREFUL INSTRUCTIONS TO OUR LOCAL COSTUME SUPPLIER ...

"GIVE ME SOMETHING THAT WILL ***SUGGEST*** SISTERHOOD OF STEEL BUT WILL STILL BE ***SAFE...***"
SIGH! DIGNITY REMAINS INCREDIBLY ELUSIVE HERE IN THE EPIC EDITORIALS ...



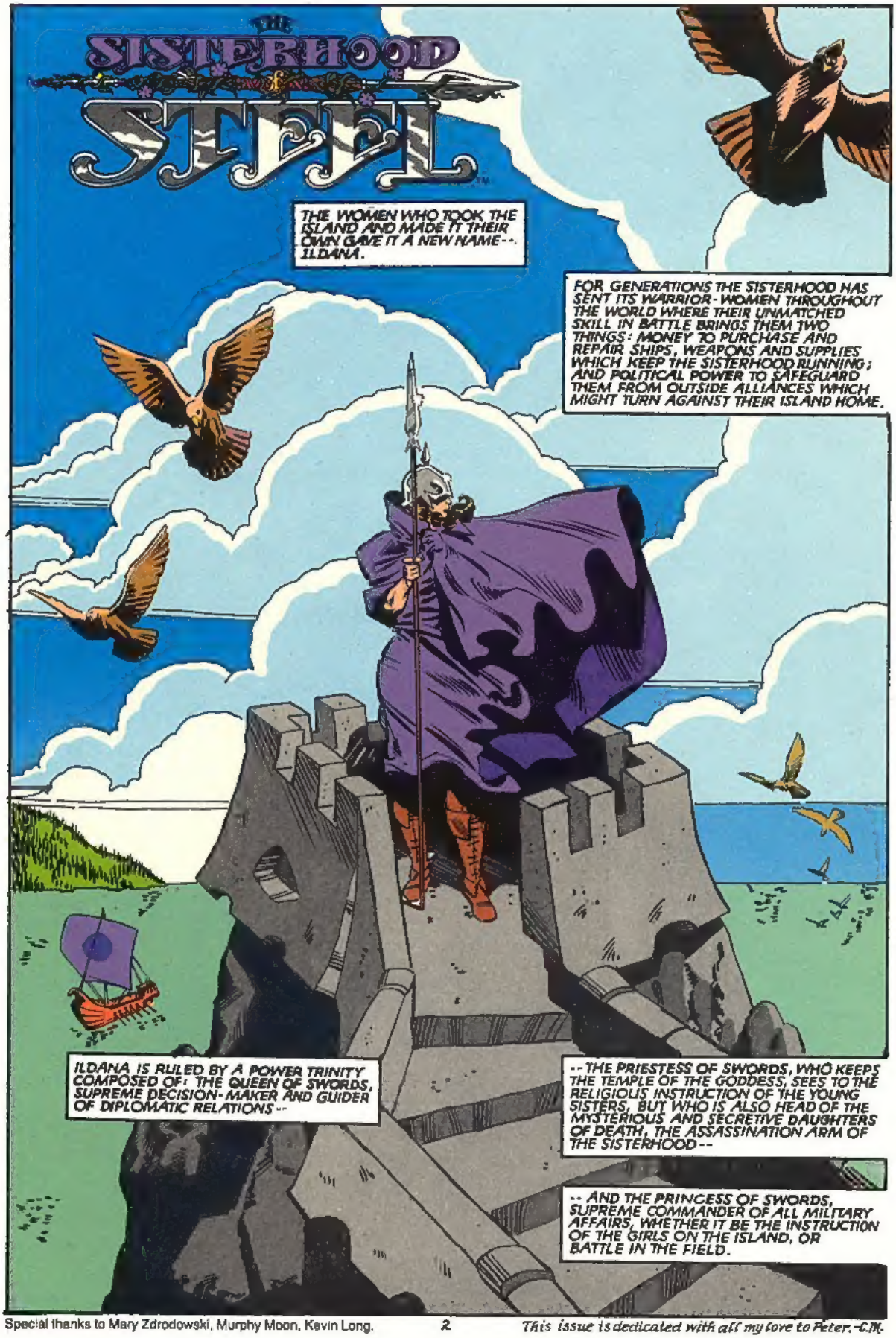
SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ Vol. 1, No. 1, December, 1984. Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President; Stan Lee, Publisher; Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing; Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. Office of Publication: 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Published bi-monthly. SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ (including all prominent characters featured in this issue) and the distinctive likenesses thereof are the trademarks of Christy Marx and Mike Vosburg. "Epic Comics" is a registered trademark of the Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ material copyright ©1984 Christy Marx and Mike Vosburg. All other material © 1984 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved. Price $1.50 per copy in the US and $1.75 in Canada. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and / or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Printed in Canada.

Before the first crude symbol of man was etched in clay or carved in stone, the ***island*** *stood like a massive and stubborn beast dominating the entrance of a great inland* ***waterway.***

The ***Western Strait*** *is the safe and open path to the* ***sea*** *beyond.*

To the ***east*** *runs the deadly, jagged line of* ***rocks*** *called the* ***Teeth of Shath.***

Those who came to the island first were a primitive tribe of ***sea-farers*** *who laid the rough stone foundations for the* ***fortress*** *that was to come.*



Special thanks to Mary Zdrodowski, Murphy Moon, Kevin Long.

This issue is dedicated with all my love to Peter. -C.M.

IT IS THE WEEK OF TRIALS, THE TIME WHEN NOVICE SISTERS UNDERGO A FINAL REVIEW OF THEIR FIGHTING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE. ONLY THE STRONGEST AND MOST TALENTED STUDENTS WILL GO INTO OFFICER RANKS. OTHERS WILL BE SUITED FOR THE LOWER RANKS OF INFANTRY.
BUT FOR THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING, THE WEEK OF TRIALS IS A TIME OF CULLING -- WHEN FAILURE MEANS SHAME AND REASSIGNMENT TO A MENIAL JOB, SUCH AS COOK, GARDENER, SEAMSTRESS, SCRIBE.
THIS TALE BEGINS WITH THE THOUGHTS OF BORONWE, TRAINED IN WARFARE SINCE THE AGE OF FOUR -- WHO NOW, AT THE AGE OF 17, IS ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE OF WOMANHOOD.
"THIS IS THE THIRD DAY IN THE WEEK OF TRIALS.
"THINGS ARE NOT GOING WELL!"
COME ON, KELKI! PUT SOME EFFORT INTO IT! THE PRIESTESS IS HERE!
I'M TRYING...
TIME!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT SUITED TO BE SWORDMATES. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WEREN'T REASSIGNED EARLIER!
LANNA, A WORD WITH YOU, PLEASE!
YES, PRIESTESS.
TAKE A REST, GIRLS!

ARE THEY LOVERS?
NO. NO, I'M PRETTY SURE THEY AREN'T.

LEAVE HER ALONE! SHE CAN GET UP BY HERSELF!

I CAME BECAUSE YOU ASKED ME TO SEE THIS GIRL, LANNA. YOU SEEM TO THINK HIGHLY OF HER ABILITY!
YOUR JUDGMENT HAS PROVEN GOOD IN THE PAST, SO I'LL GIVE HER ANOTHER CHANCE!

THANK YOU, GREYAN!
WHAT'S YOUR SPECIALITY, NOVICE BORONWË?

STICK AND SPEAR, MY LADY.

"KELKI'S BEEN MY SWORD-MATE AND BEST FRIEND FOR 12 YEARS.
"I'VE COVERED FOR HER A LOT. MAYBE TOO MUCH."
YOU MAY GO SHOWER KELKI. WE WON'T BE NEEDING YOU AGAIN!
YOU MAY, IN FACT, REMOVE NOVICE KELKI'S NAME FROM THE LISTS! THE SISTERHOOD HAS NO ROOM FOR THE WEAK OR SLOW.
GILL, WILL YOU SELECT A PARTNER FOR A STICK AND SPEAR DEMONSTRATION, PLEASE?
MAYAL! YOU'RE UP!
IT WOULD HAVE TO BE MAYAL! SHATH'S TEETH, SHE'S TOUGH!
ARE YOU READY, BORONWÉ?
YES, COMMANDER!
MAYAL'S TALL, SO I'LL HAVE TO WATCH OUT FOR HER OVERHAND STROKES!
MY BEST BET...
...GET HER...
...IS TO...
...DOWN!

DAMN AND DOUBLE DAMN!

WHO:OOMMP

Uhhfff!

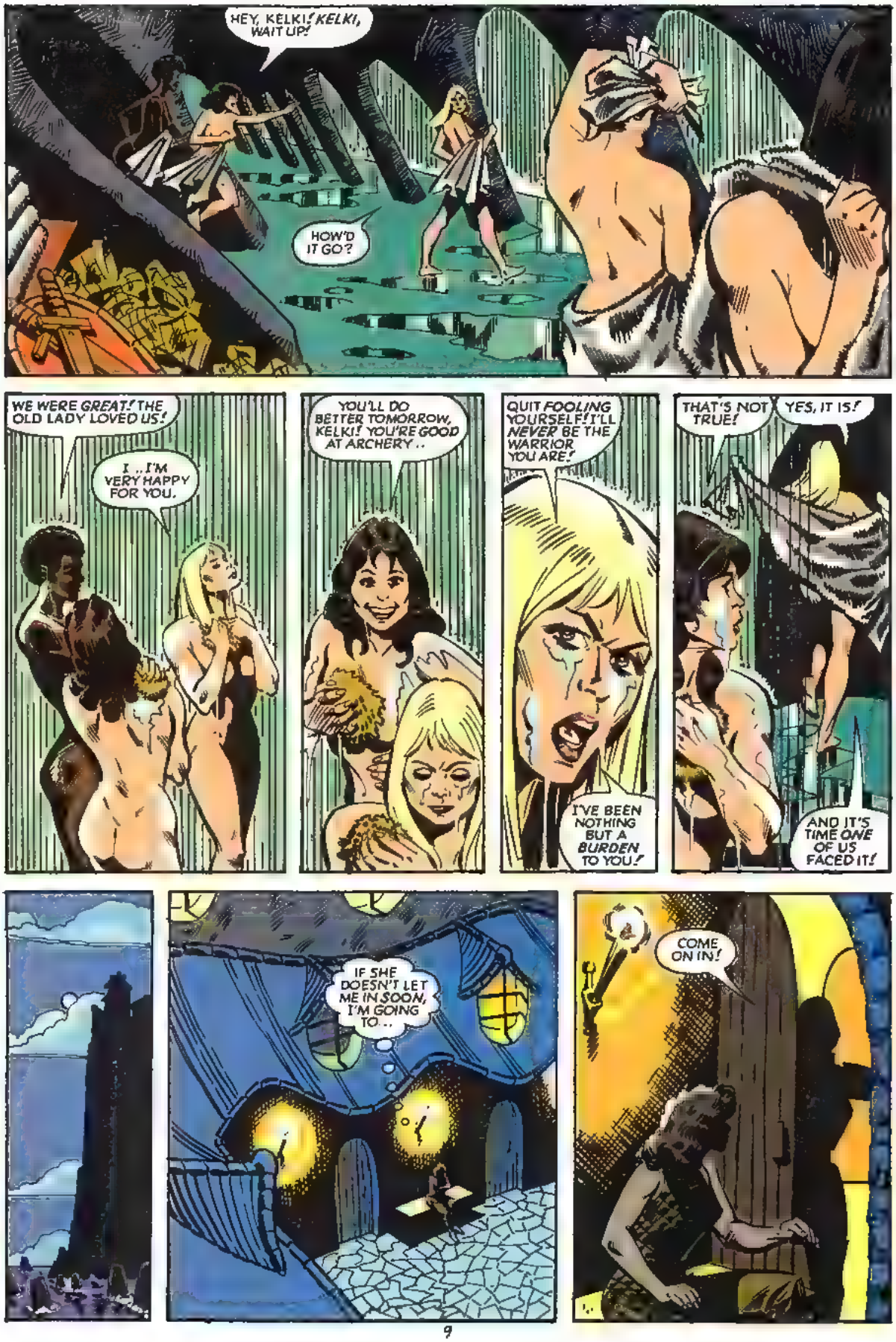
NO, LET THEM BE! A FEW BRUISES WON'T DO ANY HARM.

I WANT TO SEE HOW THIS STUDENT OF YOURS HANDLES SOME REAL COMPETITION!

SO MUCH FOR TRYING BRUTE STRENGTH! I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GET *DARING!*

HAH! I DID IT!
"I *DARE* THE PRIESTESS TO FIND FAULT WITH *THIS* MATCH!"
THAT WILL DO, THANK YOU.
TIME!

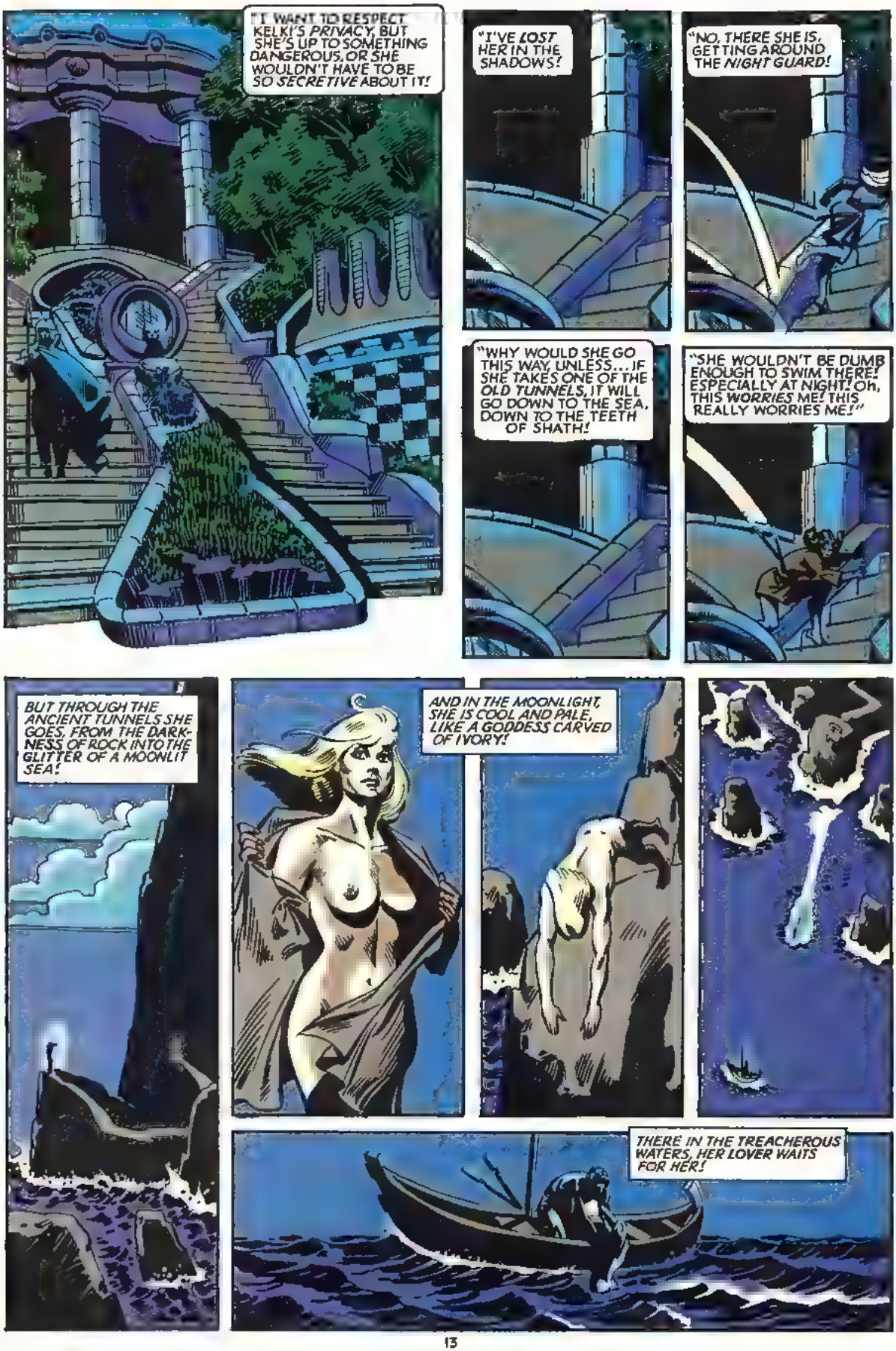
THANK THE GODDESS THAT'S OVER!
HAVE YOU SEEN ENOUGH, GREYAN? WE HAVE A LOT OF OTHER TEAMS TO JUDGE!
I AM ALSO QUITE BUSY! LET THE RECORD NOTE THAT I RECOMMEND A HIGH SCORE FOR BOTH GIRLS.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THE PANEL I GOT STUCK WITH...
"...VANDALIS, PRINCESS OF SWORDS..."
"...COMMANDER GILL..."
"...COMMANDER AMBYRE..."
"...GREYAN, PRIESTESS OF SWORDS!"
"WHY DID LANNA HAVE TO ASK HER TO COME?!"
GIVE YOU A HAND?
THANKS, SHORTY!
CONGRATULATIONS, LADIES! THE PRIESTESS GAVE YOU BOTH A COMMENDATION!
TEACHER, MAY I SPEAK WITH YOU...ALONE?
I DON'T HAVE TIME NOW, BUT I SHOULD BE IN MY STUDY LATE TONIGHT.
GO COOL OFF.


HEY, KELKI! KELKI, WAIT UP!
HOW'D IT GO?
WE WERE GREAT! THE OLD LADY LOVED US!
I .. I'M VERY HAPPY FOR YOU.
YOU'LL DO BETTER TOMORROW, KELKI! YOU'RE GOOD AT ARCHERY ..
QUIT FOOLING YOURSELF! I'LL NEVER BE THE WARRIOR YOU ARE!
I'VE BEEN NOTHING BUT A BURDEN TO YOU!
THAT'S NOT TRUE!
YES, IT IS!
AND IT'S TIME ONE OF US FACED IT!
IF SHE DOESN'T LET ME IN SOON, I'M GOING TO ..
COME ON IN!

BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING, I'LL TELL YOU WHY YOU'RE HERE. YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT KELKI.
YOU WANT TO PLEAD HER CASE FOR HER
WELL... uh, YES. I MEAN... TEACHER, I KNOW SHE CAN.
NO, SHE CAN'T!
PLUNK
GREYAN SAW HER PERFORMANCE, OR LACK OF ONE AND HAS TAKEN HER NAME OFF THE LISTS! AND THAT, MY DEAR, IS THAT!
DON'T LOOK SO GLUM!
THEY'LL GIVE HER A NICE, QUIET JOB IN THE KITCHENS SOMEWHERE.
YOU'LL STILL SEE HER FROM TIME TO TIME!
HOW ABOUT A DRINK?
NO, THANK YOU. I SHOOT IN THE MORNING. I'LL NEED A CLEAR HEAD.
BORONWE, YOU HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A POWERFUL WOMAN.
DON'T THROW IT AWAY ON MISPLACED LOYALTY!

AND LOYALTY TO THE SISTERHOOD
...IS THAT EVER MISPLACED?
SLAM!
TO SISTERHOOD...
The men who once ruled the island and and its waters gradually developed into a mixed and mongrel race of pirates. Under the bloody rule of the Pirate-King, Thibbeus, they raided ships and settlements alike.
In one such raid, the herbalist of the village was slain.
His daughter, Ataluma, and many other women were carried off...
...to serve the pleasure of the pirates!

Thibbeus claimed her for his own
He cared not what damage he did to her body or spirit. There in lay the seeds of his death
Atalumа knew that to regain her freedom and have revenge, she must survive ...and survive she did!
THAT'S THE FIFTH TIME THIS MONTH!


"I WANT TO RESPECT KELKI'S PRIVACY, BUT SHE'S UP TO SOMETHING DANGEROUS, OR SHE WOULDN'T HAVE TO BE SO SECRETIVE ABOUT IT!
"I'VE LOST HER IN THE SHADOWS!
"NO, THERE SHE IS, GETTING AROUND THE NIGHT GUARD!
"WHY WOULD SHE GO THIS WAY, UNLESS... IF SHE TAKES ONE OF THE OLD TUNNELS, IT WILL GO DOWN TO THE SEA, DOWN TO THE TEETH OF SHATH!
"SHE WOULDN'T BE DUMB ENOUGH TO SWIM THERE! ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT! Oh, THIS WORRIES ME! THIS REALLY WORRIES ME!"
BUT THROUGH THE ANCIENT TUNNELS SHE GOES, FROM THE DARKNESS OF ROCK INTO THE GLITTER OF A MOONLIT SEA!
AND IN THE MOONLIGHT, SHE IS COOL AND PALE, LIKE A GODDESS CARVED OF IVORY!
THERE IN THE TREACHEROUS WATERS, HER LOVER WAITS FOR HER!

TO BRING THE FIRES OF LOVE TO HIS GODDESS!
WHY DIDN'T SHE TELL ME? MAYBE SHE DOESN'T TRUST ME ANYMORE.
WELL, IT'S HER PROBLEM, THEN
I NEED MY SLEEP FOR TOMORROW!
NO REASON I SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR SOMEONE WHO WON'T TRUST ME AFTER TWELVE YEARS!
THE CHILLY SEA IS A SHOCK TO KELKI'S SYSTEM FROM THE WARMTH OF HER LOVER'S ARMS.
THE STRONG SWELL AND CHURNING RIPTIDES DRAIN THE LAST OF HER ENERGY.
IT'S BEEN A DAY AND NIGHT OF EMOTIONAL TURMOIL. ONE THING SHE DOESN'T NEED IS ANOTHER CONFRONTATION.
IT'S ALMOST MORNING!
Oh, GODDESS! YOU SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH!
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WITH YOU? IT'S NOT BAD ENOUGH YOU'RE SWIMMING IN THE TEETH AGAINST ALL REGULATIONS, NOT TO MENTION COMMON SENSE!
BUT TO SNEAK OUT AND DO THIS! THEY'D NAIL YOUR ASS TO THE WALL!

DON'T BE MAD AT ME, B'RON. PLEASE DON'T!
I KNOW YOU FEEL HURT, BUT HONEST, I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO INVOLVE YOU... IN CASE ANYTHING DID GO WRONG!
Oh, B'RON, MY DEAR FRIEND, YOU'VE HAD MEN AND ENJOYED THEM. WASN'T THERE EVER ONE MAN WHO WAS SPECIAL? ONE MAN YOU WANTED TO BE WITH OVER AND OVER AGAIN FOREVER?
I'VE NEVER MET ONE WORTH WHAT YOU'RE RISKING!
VOSSE IS DIFFERENT! BELIEVE ME, HE IS! HE LOVES ME! I KNOW YOU MUST HATE ME NOW
BUT PLEASE KEEP MY SECRET, JUST FOR A LITTLE WHILE!
KELKI, YOU'RE MY FRIEND! I'D NEVER BETRAY YOU!
I ..I'M SORRY. I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER
LET'S GET INSIDE BEFORE YOU CATCH A CHILL!
DAY FOUR. ARCHERY TESTING. GODDESS, WHAT I'D GIVE FOR A FEW HOURS OF SLEEP!"
WAKE UP, NOVICE! YOU'RE UP AND I WANT TO SEE SOME NECK HITS!
"I LOVE THE POWER OF THE BOW! THE SNAP OF RELEASE, THE SINGING THRUM OF THE SHAFT IN FLIGHT!
"IT'S WARRIOR'S MUSIC!"
SSSSSHHHHOOOOONNNK!
SSSSSHHHHOOOOO
SSS

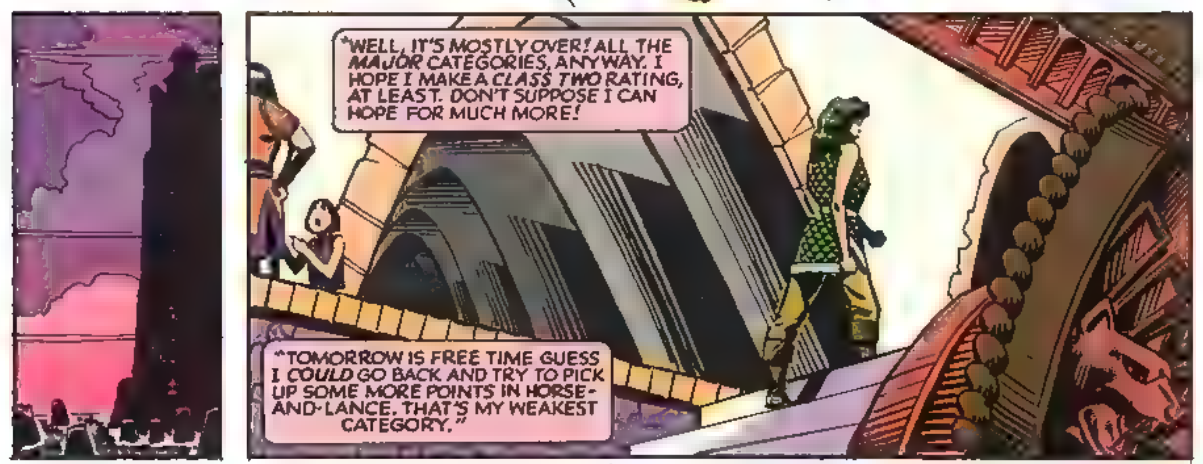
"AS LONG AS YOU'RE NOT ON THE RECIEVING END, THAT IS!"
DON'T GET TOO COCKY JUST YET, YOUNG LADY!
DID IT GO WELL TODAY?
Uh-humm.
YOU'RE TIRED, hunh?
Ummmm.
B'RON, I WANT YOU TO KNOW, BORONWE?
GOOD-BYE, MY DEAR FRIEND. FARE YOU WELL
Atafuma carefully made her plans over the long months of humiliation that followed.
She secretly plied Thibbeus with drugs which allowed her to bend his mind subtly to her will, for she was well taught by her father in the properties and uses of plants

She gathered to her a cadre of loyal women...
...and taught them one skill.
But it was the only skill they would need.
And when Ataluma knew her women were ready, she began! While Thibbeus snored in drugged sleep
...she went to his most greedy and ambitious rival, D'lak, and gave herself to him, claiming Thibbeus was weak and useless!
D'lak already nurtured dreams of ousting Thibbeus and becoming the Pirate-King!
Ataluma endured his foul embrace and saw to it that his dreams took root in reality!
"DAY FIVE. WRESTLING AND HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN BED!"

TIME! LET UP, DELANI!
WHERE'S YOUR MIND TODAY? A TEN YEAR OLD WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER!
KELKI WASN'T IN HER BED THIS MORNING AND I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIND HER! SHE. .
FORGET ABOUT KELKI!
WIN THE NEXT MATCH AND WIN IT GOOD OR YOUR SCORE AND RANK ON THE LISTS WILL GO TO HELL IN A HANDBASKET!
MOVE!
OF ALL THE COLD, NASTY.
NO, SHE'S RIGHT!
THIS IS MY FUTURE AT STAKE! FROM NOW ON...
. WHEN I FIGHT..
THWUMP
. I'M GOING TO WIN!
STICK THAT IN YOUR HELMET, LANNA!

THIS IS REALLY STARTING TO BOTHER ME! THERE'S NO SIGN KELKI'S BEEN HERE AT ALL! THEY *MIGHT* HAVE TRANSFERRED HER TO ANOTHER ROOM ALREADY, BUT SURELY THEY'D TELL ME!
KELKI WOULD TELL ME, AT LEAST!
IT COULDN'T BE. SOME OF HER THINGS ARE STILL HERE
OF COURSE, IT'S JUST HER JUNK.. Oh, NO!
"SHE'S DONE IT! SHE'S *RUN OFF* WITH HER LOVER AND ONLY TAKEN HER NECESSITIES!
"KELKI, YOU IDIOT! THE MINUTE THEY REALIZE YOU'RE GONE, THEY'LL *COME AFTER* YOU!"
I SHOULD TELL LANNA. NO, I *DID* MENTION IT THIS MORNING! I'VE DONE MY DUTY. I WON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD ABOUT IT...UNTIL THEY *ASK!*
"DAY SIX. HISTORY, TACTICS AND STRATEGY. I'M USUALLY GOOD AT THIS STUFF.
"I WONDER WHERE KELKI AND HER MAN ARE NOW?"
DEPENDS ON WHETHER THEY WENT BY LAND OR SEA
BY NOW THEY COULD BE IN .
Uh-oh, BACK TO THE WARS!

It took little effort for Ataluma to bring her plan to fruition. D'ak challenged Thibbeus, and the island burst into chaos!
Before the day was through, D'ak had triumphed, unaware that Ataluma had guaranteed his victory by weakening Thibbeus with one of her potions! And all of Thibbeus' men were dead, thus cutting in half the number of pirates upon the island!


"WELL, IT'S MOSTLY OVER! ALL THE MAJOR CATEGORIES, ANYWAY. I HOPE I MAKE A CLASS TWO RATING, AT LEAST. DON'T SUPPOSE I CAN HOPE FOR MUCH MORE!
"TOMORROW IS FREE TIME GUESS I COULD GO BACK AND TRY TO PICK UP SOME MORE POINTS IN HORSE-AND-LANCE. THAT'S MY WEAKEST CATEGORY."

IT WAS THAT HORSE THEY GAVE ME! THE *WORST-TEMPERED*.. HEY, THAT'S *KELKI'S* BED IN THE HALLWAY!

HELLO, MAYA!.
WOULD YOU MIND TELLING ME WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON?

DO I KNOW? THEY TOLD ME TO MOVE IN AND REPLACE YOUR OTHER SWORD-MATE!

NO ONE MENTIONED ANYTHING TO *ME!*
WELL, THAT'S BUREAUCRACY FOR YOU!

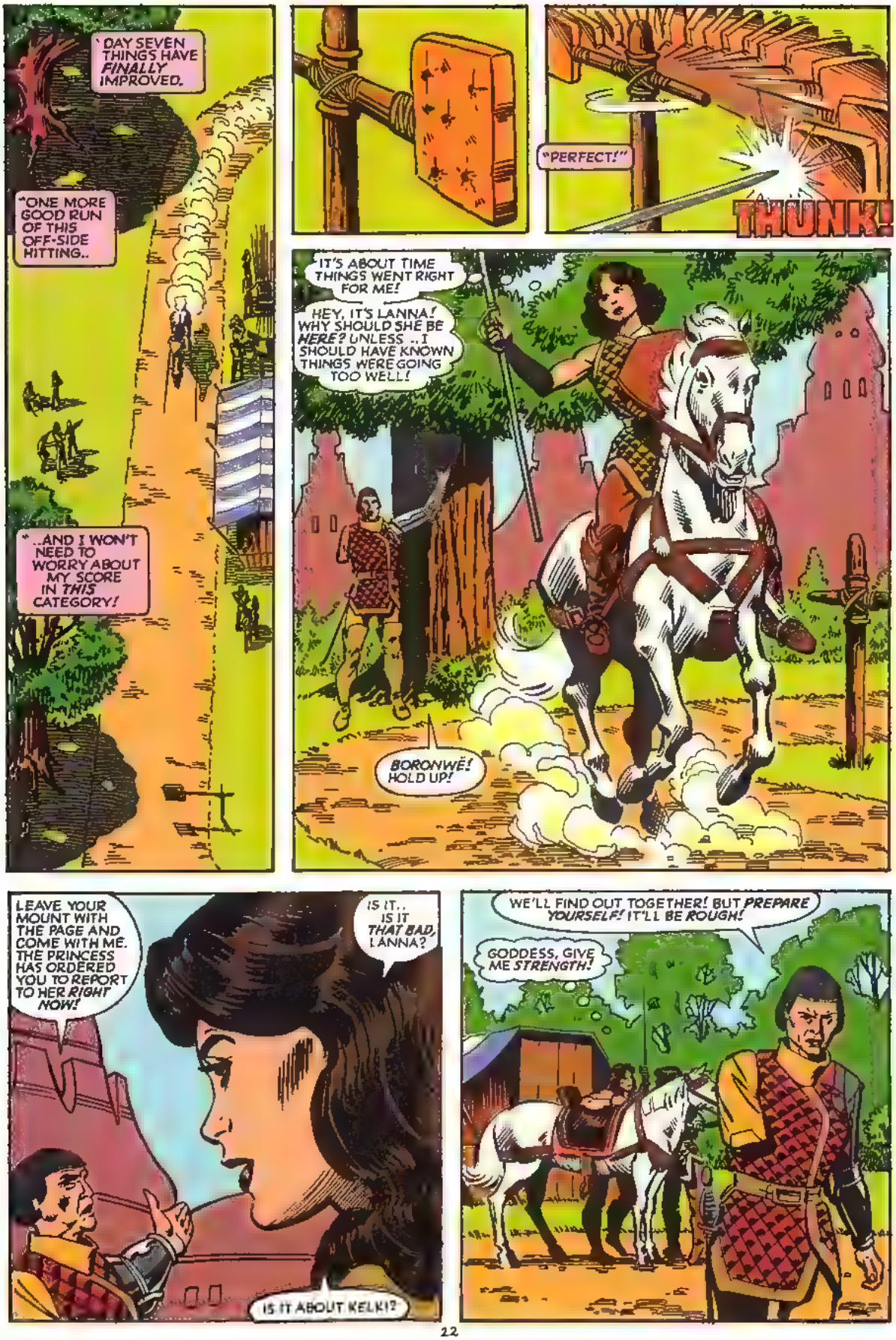
BE GLAD YOU'RE NOT TALL! YOU SHOULD *TRY* HAULING *THIS* BED AROUND!

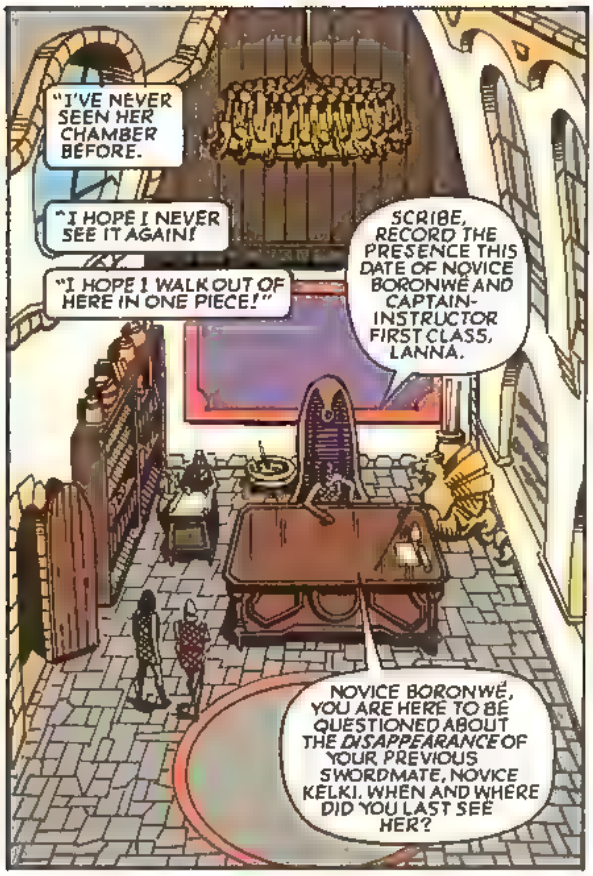
WHERE ARE KELKI'S BELONGINGS? WHAT DID YOU *DO* WITH THEM?
THERE WAS *NOTHING* HERE!

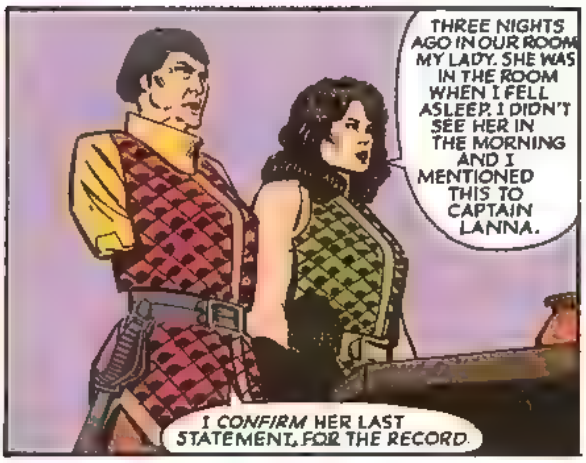
LOOK, I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* YOUR PROBLEM IS, BUT *DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON ME!*
YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE, *FINE!* BUT TELL ME BEFORE I HAUL IN ANYTHING ELSE!

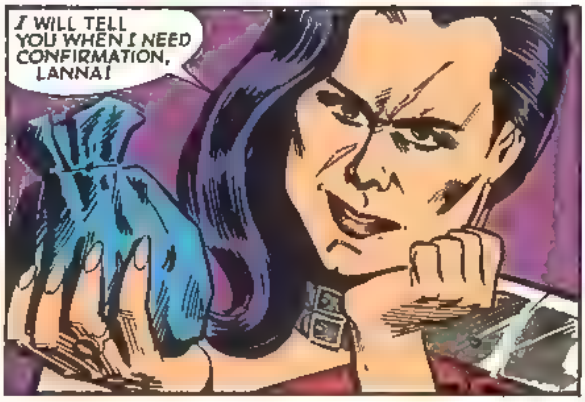
IT'S. . A PERSONAL THING. NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU AT ALL! *SORRY* TO BE SUCH A FISHWIFE!
TELL YOU WHAT .

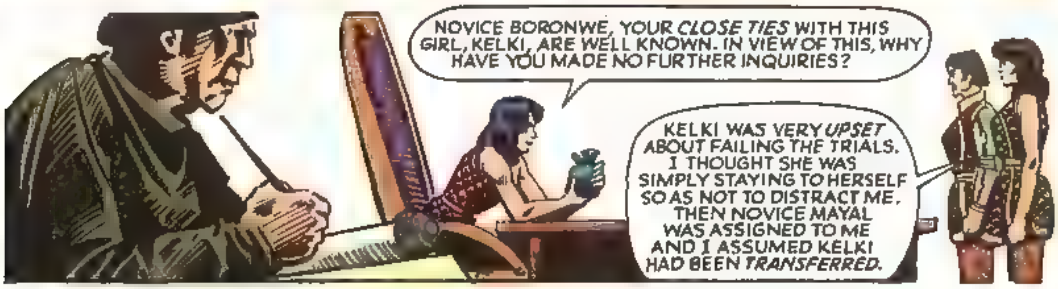
...LET ME HAVE THE TOP SHELF AND *ALL* IS FORGIVEN!
MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME, SWORDMATE!


'DAY SEVEN THINGS HAVE *FINALLY* IMPROVED.
"ONE MORE GOOD RUN OF THIS OFF-SIDE HITTING..
"...AND I WON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT MY SCORE IN *THIS* CATEGORY!
"PERFECT!"
THUNK!
IT'S ABOUT TIME THINGS WENT RIGHT FOR ME!
HEY, IT'S LANNA! WHY SHOULD SHE BE *HERE?* UNLESS ..I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THINGS WERE GOING TOO WELL!
BORONWË! HOLD UP!
LEAVE YOUR MOUNT WITH THE PAGE AND COME WITH ME. THE PRINCESS HAS ORDERED YOU TO REPORT TO HER *RIGHT NOW!*
IS IT.. IS IT *THAT BAD,* LANNA?
IS IT ABOUT KELKI?
WE'LL FIND OUT TOGETHER! BUT *PREPARE YOURSELF!* IT'LL BE *ROUGH!*
GODDESS, GIVE ME *STRENGTH!*


"I'VE NEVER SEEN HER CHAMBER BEFORE.
"I HOPE I NEVER SEE IT AGAIN!
"I HOPE I WALK OUT OF HERE IN ONE PIECE!"
SCRIBE, RECORD THE PRESENCE THIS DATE OF NOVICE BORONWË AND CAPTAIN-INSTRUCTOR FIRST CLASS, LANNA.
NOVICE BORONWË, YOU ARE HERE TO BE QUESTIONED ABOUT THE *DISAPPEARANCE* OF YOUR PREVIOUS SWORDMATE, NOVICE KELKI. WHEN AND WHERE DID YOU LAST SEE HER?


THREE NIGHTS AGO IN OUR ROOM MY LADY. SHE WAS IN THE ROOM WHEN I FELL ASLEEP. I DIDN'T SEE HER IN THE MORNING AND I MENTIONED THIS TO CAPTAIN LANNA.
I *CONFIRM* HER LAST STATEMENT, FOR THE RECORD.

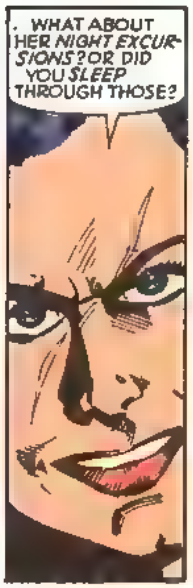

I WILL TELL YOU WHEN I NEED CONFIRMATION, LANNA!


NOVICE BORONWË, YOUR *CLOSE TIES* WITH THIS GIRL, KELKI, ARE WELL KNOWN. IN VIEW OF THIS, WHY HAVE YOU MADE NO FURTHER INQUIRIES?
KELKI WAS VERY *UPSET* ABOUT FAILING THE TRIALS. I THOUGHT SHE WAS SIMPLY STAYING TO HERSELF SO AS NOT TO DISTRACT ME. THEN NOVICE MAYAL WAS ASSIGNED TO ME AND I ASSUMED KELKI HAD BEEN *TRANSFERRED*.

MAY I ASK, PRINCESS, IF SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO KELKI?

A SEARCH HAS SHOWN SHE IS NOT ON THE ISLAND. AS FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HER

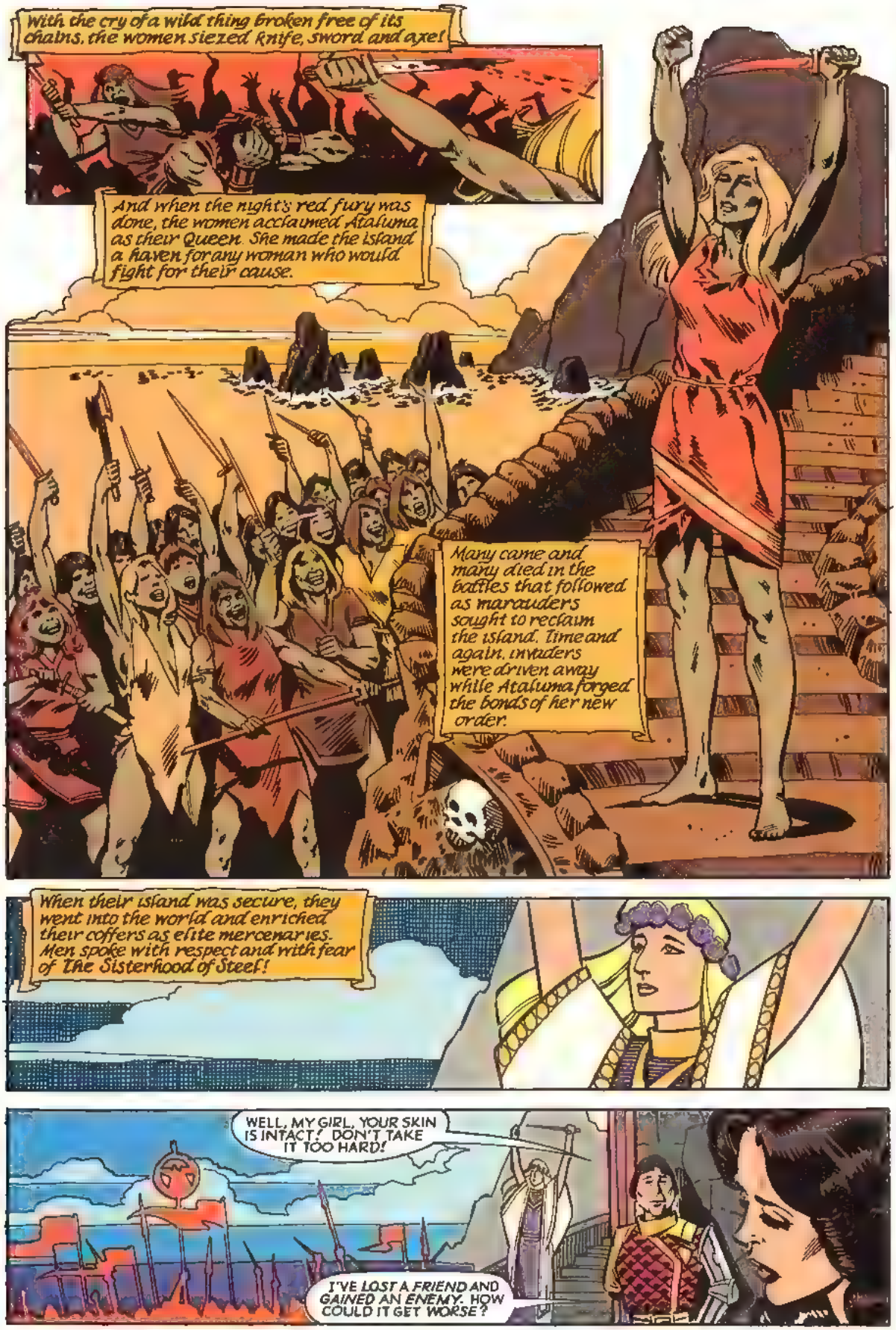
...I THOUGHT *YOU* COULD TELL US THAT!
I WISH I KNEW, MY LADY! I'VE BEEN VERY WORRIED!
INDEED...


. WHAT ABOUT HER *NIGHT EXCURSIONS*? OR DID YOU *SLEEP* THROUGH THOSE?

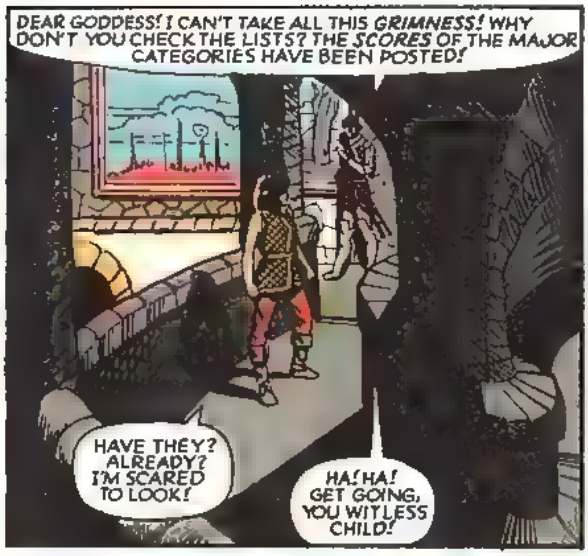
SHE KNOWS! A GUARD MUST HAVE SEEN KELKI! BUT HOW MUCH DOES SHE KNOW? SHE COULD BE TRYING TO BLUFF ME! I WISH I WAS A BETTER LIAR!
I'LL HAVE TO STICK AS CLOSE TO THE TRUTH AS I CAN AND HOPE THAT'S ALL SHE KNOWS!

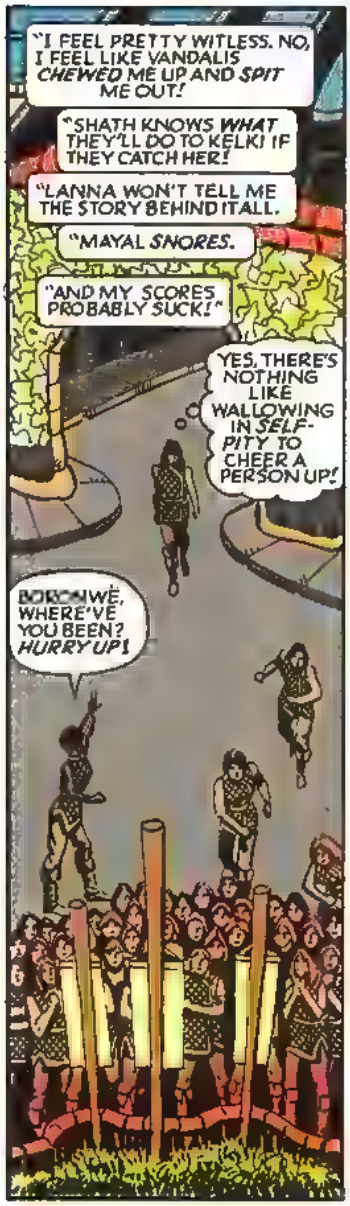
NO, MY LADY, I KNEW SHE WOULD SOMETIMES GO OUT TO SWIM. IT HELPED HER WHEN SHE WAS TROUBLED AND COULDN'T SLEEP. I WARNED HER IT WAS DANGEROUS, BUT SHE WOULDN'T LISTEN!
YOU SHOULD HAVE REPORTED HER FOR BREAKING REGULATIONS. BUT THEN, SHE IS YOUR FRIEND.
NATURALLY YOU WOULD WANT TO PROTECT HER! I HAVE THESE.
...THE ITEMS LEFT BEHIND ON HER SHELF. NOTHING FOR PERSONAL HYGIENE. NOTHING OF IMPORTANCE AT ALL!
WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS?
I DON'T KNOW, PRINCESS! I DIDN'T TAKE THEM, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE IMPLYING!
WATCH YOUR MOUTH! ONE MORE ANSWER LIKE THAT, NOVICE...
...AND I'LL REMOVE YOUR NAME FROM THE LISTS, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR SCORES ARE!
I DEMAND TO SPEAK!
REFUSED!
I HAVE MY RIGHTS! I MAY SPEAK, AND I WILL SPEAK, IN NOVICE BORONWE'S DEFENSE!
EVEN YOUR RANK DOESN'T ALLOW YOU TO THREATEN A NOVICE IN THIS WAY! BORONWE HAS ACTED CORRECTLY IN THIS MATTER AND CANNOT BE BLAMED FOR HER SWORDMATE'S BEHAVIOR!
SHATH'S TEETH! I NEVER REALIZED HOW MUCH THESE TWO HATE ONE ANOTHER! IT'S LIKE A SOLID WALL BETWEEN THEM! WITH ME IN THE MIDDLE!
I KNOW LANNA AND VANDALIS FOUGHT TOGETHER IN THE BATTLE THAT COST LANNA HER ARM...

...BUT I WONDER HOW MUCH MORE THERE IS TO THE STORY?
YOUR PROTEST IS NOTED. I HAVE BUT ONE MORE QUESTION. ANSWER IT WITH GREAT CARE!
NOVICE, DO YOU KNOW WHERE KELKI IS OR MAY BE FOUND?
NO, MY LADY
LET THE RECORD SHOW THAT NOVICE BORON WE'S ANSWERS HAVE BEEN BARELY SATISFACTORY, BORDERING ON INSUBORDINATION! HOWEVER, I SEE NO CAUSE FOR CHARGES AGAINST HER AT THIS TIME!
WE'LL RE-EVALUATE THE MATTER WHEN THE DESERTER HAS BEEN CAUGHT AND CAN BE QUESTIONED!
YOU ARE BOTH DIS-MISSED!
"Ah, KELKI, KELKI, WHEREVER YOU MAY BE, RUN FAST, RUN FAR, FOR THERE IS NO MERCY FOR YOU HERE!"
Ataluma and her women prepared a victory feast that night for D'ak and his men. Every man on the island drank of the wine the women served, though the women themselves did not drink of it
D'ak felt the poison even as his men moaned and died around him. He cursed Ataluma.
She cursed him back and stabbed him to the heart with a kitchen knife!


With the cry of a wild thing broken free of its chains, the women siezed knife, sword and axe!
And when the night's red fury was done, the women acclaimed Ataluma as their Queen. She made the island a haven for any woman who would fight for their cause.
Many came and many died in the battles that followed as marauders sought to reclaim the island. Time and again, invaders were driven away while Ataluma forged the bonds of her new order.
When their island was secure, they went into the world and enriched their coffers as elite mercenaries. Men spoke with respect and with fear of The Sisterhood of Steel!
WELL, MY GIRL, YOUR SKIN IS INTACT! DON'T TAKE IT TOO HARD!
I'VE LOST A FRIEND AND GAINED AN ENEMY. HOW COULD IT GET WORSE?

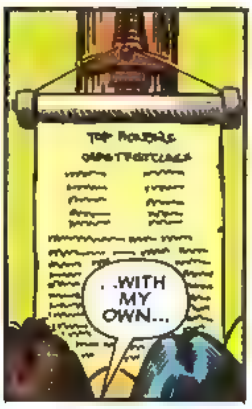
I'M SOMEWHAT TO BLAME, I'M AFRAID! YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN LIKE A *DAUGHTER* TO ME AND I'VE GIVEN YOU MUCH MORE ATTENTION THAN THE OTHER GIRLS. AND VANDALIS WATCHES ME *CLOSELY!*
LANNA, I KNOW I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK, BUT .
SOMEDAY I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT, BORONWÉ. THIS ISN'T THE TIME!

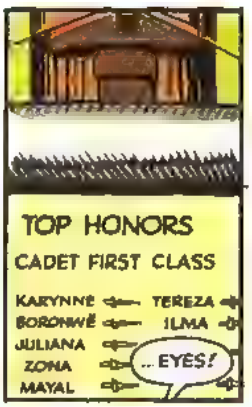

DEAR GODDESS! I CAN'T TAKE ALL THIS *GRIMNESS!* WHY DON'T YOU CHECK THE LISTS? THE *SCORES* OF THE MAJOR CATEGORIES HAVE BEEN POSTED!
HAVE THEY? ALREADY? I'M SCARED TO LOOK!
HA! HA! GET GOING, YOU WITLESS CHILD!


"I FEEL PRETTY WITLESS. NO, I FEEL LIKE VANDALIS *CHEWED* ME UP AND *SPIT* ME OUT!
"SHATH KNOWS *WHAT* THEY'LL DO TO KELKI IF THEY CATCH HER!
"LANNA WON'T TELL ME THE STORY BEHIND IT ALL.
"MAYAL *SNORES.*
"AND MY SCORES PROBABLY SUCK!"
YES, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE WALLOWING IN *SELF-PITY* TO CHEER A PERSON UP!
BORONWÉ, WHERE'VE YOU BEEN? *HURRY UP!*

WE *DID* IT! WE *MADE* IT! WE'RE *OFFICER MATERIAL!!*

I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT...


TOP HONORS
CADET FIRST CLASS
.. WITH MY OWN...


TOP HONORS
CADET FIRST CLASS
KARYNNÉ TEREZA
BORONWÉ ILMA
JULIANA
ZONA .. EYES!
MAYAL

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

YA-HOOO!!!

A MERCHANT SHIP LEAVES THE WESTERN STRAIT, WELL ON ITS WAY TO THE OPEN SEA AND DISTANT SHORES.

THE GREY STONY BULWARK OF ILDANA'S SEAWARD CLIFFS STILL TOWERS UPON THE HORIZON.

YOU SEE, MY LOVE? WE'VE PASSED UNDER ITS VERY *SHADOW* AND *NO HARM* HAS COME TO US!

NO OGRES, NO DEMONS...

...NO SHIP OF THE *SISTERHOOD* FALLING UPON US!

NO, VOSSE! DON'T EVEN *BREATHE* THEIR NAME ALOUD!

MY POOR *TIMID* GIRL! NOTHING WILL HARM YOU AS LONG AS I LIVE! MY *SWORD* AND THE ARM THAT WIELDS IT IS ALL THE *PROTECTION* YOU SHALL NEED!

I *WISH* THAT WERE TRUE! I CANNOT MAKE YOU *UNDERSTAND*, CAN I, LOVE? THE SISTERHOOD MUST FIND ME AND PASS *JUDGEMENT* ON ME--AND NEVER REST UNTIL THEY DO! SOMEDAY, HOWEVER LONG IT MAY TAKE, I WILL *PAY* THE *PRICE*!

THEN, FOR AN INSTANT, IT SEEMS TO KELKI THAT SHE HEARS BORONWË'S VOICE RAISED IN A CRY OF EXULTATION!

BUT IT IS, SURELY, JUST A TRICK OF THE WIND!

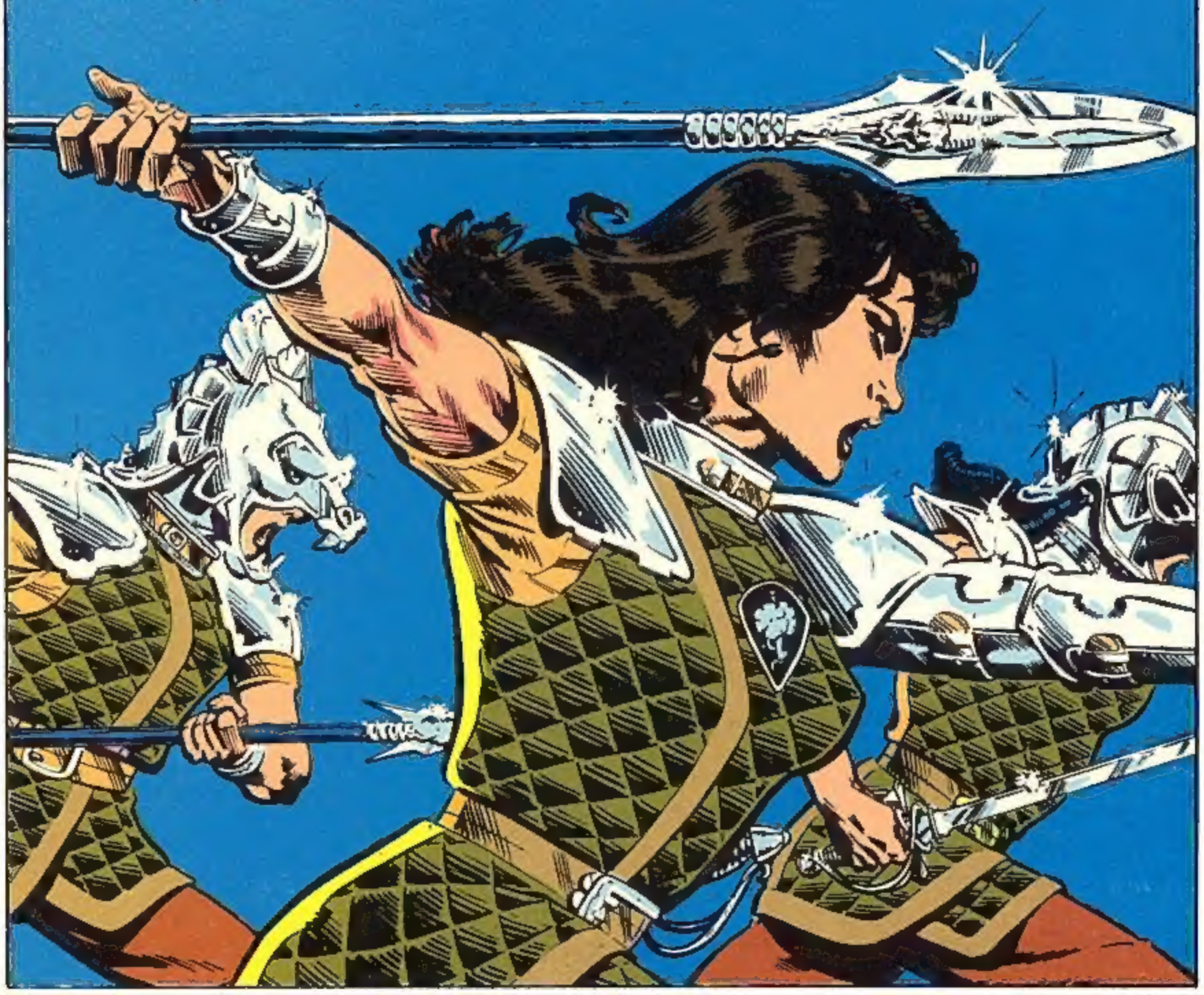
NEXT ISSUE: Boronwë faces an ordeal of body and spirit and a challenge from Vandalis in "The Ritual of Womanhood!"

REMARKS BY MARX

Welcome to the world of the Sisterhood. It's a fantasy world, whose history is a parallel to our own, but not to be taken as a prehistory (as in the Hyborean Age). It may be an alternate line of reality; it may be a different world altogether. However you choose to see it, I hope you'll enjoy what Mike Vosburg and I have concocted for you.

We're striving to create a book that will appeal equally to male and female readers, through a good story and interesting characters. You'll be the final judge of how well we succeed, so take up pen and paper, put your fingers on the typewriter, or boot up the computer, and write to us! Tell us what you like and what you don't like, what works for you and what doesn't.

A lot of people have asked me about the pronunciation of Boronwë's name. For a guide to the names and personages in this issue, please see the appendixes.



APPENDIX #1

Who's Who and Pronunciation Guide

Most of the pronunciations are self-evident. Emphasis is on the syllable in capital letters.

Boronwë (Buh RON way): the last syllable is slightly aspirated and not heavily pronounced. In this story, Boronwë is 17 and a novice, meaning that she has been rigorously trained since the age of 4 when she was bought by the Sisterhood and brought to Ildana. By passing her Trials, she becomes a Cadet, ready to be sent to a Sisterhood outpost where she will serve in battle or in any other fashion required of her.

Kelki (KELL key): Like Boronwë, she was bought by the Sisterhood and has spent 13 years of her life in training. Unlike her swordmate, Kelki wasn't strong enough or skilled enough to pa§s the Trials, and faced the prospect of an empty life on the island doing administrative service.

Lanna (LAN nah): A fine warrior who was well on her way to honors and high rank when she lost her right arm in a minor skirmish. For decades she has served as Instructor First Class for girls of ages 14-17. Though she doesn't hold a high military rank, she is still well respected within certain circles of the Sisterhood.

Greyan (Grā YAN): Holds the rank of Priestess of Swords. Of all the recent women to hold the title of Priestess, Greyan has the least sorcerous power.

Vandalis (Van DAY liss): Holds the rank of Princess of Swords, a position she's earned by her battle-skill and successes in the field.

Mayal (Māy AL): A novice of considerable ability who made top scores in the Trials and became a Cadet First Class, which means she is expected to do well enough in the field to become an officer.

Gill (GILL): Commander First Class. Known for her quiet courage and common sense. Highly valued as a diplomatic representative for the Sisterhood, as well as for her fighting skill.

Ambyre (Am buyer): Equal emphasis on both syllables. This tough warrior's nickname is "The Merry Widowmaker" because of the many men she has killed in battle. She holds the rank of Commander First Class, but only because it was forced on her. Left to her own, she would spend her life testing the power of her ax against any opponent that will face her.

APPENDIX #2

The Matrix

The Matrix is the overall title for the trinity of power which governs the Sisterhood. It consists of the Queen of Swords, the Priestess of Swords, and the Princess of Swords.

In addition to the Matrix, there are three other significant bodies which are involved in decision-making procedures: The House of the Matron; and the two parliamentary houses, the House of Gold and the House of Silver.

The Matrix is ruled by the **Queen of Swords**. The Queen is an elected ruler, chosen for a combination of martial skills, diplomatic arts and leadership. She serves until her death or retirement and may choose her successor, but the successor must be approved by the Matrix.

Next in power is the **Priestess of Swords**. She does not hold a strictly military rank, but she has the power to command the military if necessary. Her true power comes from her command of the Daughters of Death and her knowledge, passed from Priestess to Priestess, in the use of plants for making drugs and poisons. She is also the keeper of the Temple of the Goddess, and sees to the religious instruction of all the young Sisters.

The **Princess of Swords** is of nearly equal power to the Priestess, with one major difference — the Princess holds strictly military rank. She has no power to issue orders or countermand orders to the Daughters of Death. She may influence, but not directly command, the policies of diplomacy. The Princess is the only rank higher than that of Commander First Class and her orders in the field may be countermanded only by the Priestess or the Queen.

The Priestess and the Princess may be thought of as the two bottom corners of a triangle of power, with the Queen at the top. The Princess has open, direct military power, while the Priestess deals most often behind the scenes and in secrecy. Yet both are held in check by yet another position of power, The Matron.

The Matron is head of a large administrative organization, the House of the Matron, and is responsible for the entire financial affairs of the Sisterhood, as well as the day-to-day running of the island. She controls the treasury, sets budgets, approves the purchase of gear and weapons, as well as basic provisions of food, clothing, leather goods, and all the many small, but important activities that allows the Sisterhood to survive on an island that could not otherwise support its population. She cannot intervene in strictly military matters, but a soft word in the Queen's ear can carry a large amount of influence. The Matron is appointed by the Queen, and answers only to her, but the appointment must be confirmed by the parliamentary Houses. She serves until death or retirement.

The parliamentary Houses debate and vote on issues of military importance, policy-setting, or matters concerning the entire body of the organization.

The senior of the two Houses is **The House of Gold**, composed of women who are veterans of battle, retired permanently to the island. Lanna is a Gold, and is in fact a leader within the Golds, a major appointment to the faction that supports Vandalis. Once appointed to serve as a Gold, the woman holds the position until death or retirement.

The junior house is **The House of Silver**, a large body of warrior-women which has a rotating membership, depending on which of its selected members are on Ildana at the time the Houses must convene and vote. The women chosen for this honor are still active warriors, who serve in the House only when on Ildana between military assignments or on rest leave. This unpredictable quality of the Silvers balances against the stable, therefore predictable, nature of the Golds. It also guarantees a voice for the Sisters who are most in tune with the events of the outside world.